Dragon-Sitting for Dummies

By Jonathan Olvera

I was sprawled on the couch, buried under my trusty red blanket — the kind of fabric that manages to trap just the right amount of warmth while making you look like an undercooked burrito. The TV was running on autopilot, flashing through a parade of commercials that all promised life-changing happiness if I only bought a slightly shinier toaster.

That was the moment the nap took me.

One minute I was half-watching a game show rerun; the next, my brain spiraled into that strange dream-world where nothing has rules, and yet everything makes sense.

When I opened my eyes again, I wasn't in my living room. I was standing barefoot on cold stone. The air carried the bite of alpine wind, and far above, a fortress clung to a mountain like it had been built just to dare gravity to do its worst. Smoke curled down from its walls, sliding along the cliffs until it pooled in a rocky basin below.

And then came the wings.

A dragon — an actual dragon — burst from the castle walls, scales flashing red like molten armor. His wings snapped open with a sound like someone shaking out a tarp the size of a football field. He landed before me, eyes glowing like barbecue coals.

And then he spoke. In English.

"Excuse me," he rumbled, his voice accompanied by tiny sparks and curls of smoke. "Would you mind babysitting my kid for the weekend?"

I blinked. "Sorry, what?"

The dragon nodded gravely, as though asking a total stranger to watch his fire-breathing offspring was the most normal thing in the world. Behind him, a mound of dirt shifted. Two little horns poked out, followed by a snout, followed by the rest of a red-scaled baby dragon. The little guy shook off grass, blinked his glowing yellow eyes at me, and said cheerfully:

"Hi."

I looked from the hatchling to the parent. "You want me to… babysit *that*?"

“You’ll be rewarded,” the dragon promised, in the same tone parents use when bribing babysitters with pizza money. And with that, he spread his wings, muttered something about “dragon yoga retreat,” and launched himself into the clouds.

I was alone with the baby.

“Okay, buddy,” I said, squatting down to his level. “What do you like to do? Tag? Fetch? Watching Netflix?”

The dragonlet snorted, releasing a puff of smoke that singed my eyebrows. Then he pointed his claws at the rocky basin. “Rocks. Need more rocks.”

That was apparently the start of our weekend project.

The kid led me to a nest-like hollow filled with stones. He bounced on his little talons, flapped his stubby wings, and looked expectantly at me. “More!”

So there I was — hiking around the mountainside, hauling rocks of every shape and size like some unpaid intern in Mythical Creature Daycare. Every time I dragged a boulder back, the dragonling would examine it critically, nod, and then blast it with fire. The air filled with the sound of crackling flame, the smell of toasted granite, and my muttered complaints about needing a chiropractor.

The results, though, were… shocking.

After each fiery breath, the stones shimmered, cracked, and melted. Out of the mess came streaks of gold, flecks of silver, and, occasionally, a crystal so bright it made me squint. The kid was basically finger-painting with lava — except instead of messes, he was churning out raw wealth.

“Good stone,” he would chirp after a particularly fiery blast, holding up what looked like a freshly minted diamond the size of a jawbreaker. He casually tossed it aside like it was a gum wrapper.

By Saturday night, we had a glittering pile of treasure in the nest. The dragonling was happy, exhausted, and, after one particularly big fire-breath, had accidentally melted the soles of my shoes.

“Buddy,” I said, wiggling my toes through the smoldering remains, “this is coming out of your allowance.”

Sunday morning, I awoke by the little fire we’d built together, my face smudged with soot, my pockets jingling with stray jewels the baby had tossed at me. Overhead, a shadow grew large against the rising sun.

Mom was back.

She landed with a gust of wind that knocked me flat on my back. The ground trembled under her claws as she peered at the nest. The pile of gold, silver, and diamonds sparkled in the dawn.

“Impressive,” she said, her voice softening with maternal pride. Then she turned to me. “You’ve done well.”

“Thanks,” I muttered, brushing ash off my blanket-turned-cloak. “Though I’m going to need a tetanus shot and some new sneakers.”

She huffed, and a ruby the size of a baseball rolled to my feet. Payment. Not bad for a weekend gig.

The baby waved a claw. “Bye! Come again!”

And just like that, the world flickered.

I blinked and found myself back on my couch, the TV still droning on about life-changing toasters. My blanket was still wrapped around me, but now… heavier. I reached into the folds and pulled out a glittering stone.

I laughed out loud. “Well, guess babysitting rates just went up.”